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THE ROLE OF MOBILE PHONE AND POWERPOINT IN ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS: LECTURERS' REFLECTIONS

Muhammad Siddique

Manvender Kaur Sarjit Singh

School of Educational Studies and Modern Languages, University Utara Malaysia

ABSTRACT: These day mobile phones are being resorted to as indispensable pedagogical tools for imparting language skills to the present day students who are termed as 'Generation Y', 'Net Generation' and above all 'Digital Natives'. Mobile phones have the potential to be reliable pedagogical tool to teach writing which is the most neglected skills to the intermediate students. The current paper examines the perceptions of two lecturers regarding the use of mobile phones and PowerPoint in teaching descriptive essay writing skills to intermediate students at M.A.O. College, Lahore. The qualitative data for this purpose was collected by means of semi-structured interviews from those two lecturers who taught experimental as well as control groups respectively. The findings of the study indicated that the lecturer of experimental group was very much in favour of mobile phones to be incorporated in the teaching writing class. Even the lecturer of control group favoured the use of new technology as she was not in favour of PowerPoint to be used for teaching writing skills. Moreover, the findings of the study indicated that the mobile phones can very easily, successfully and conveniently be employed as pedagogical tool to impart writing skills as they can motivate the lecturers for teaching as well as the students for learning the writing skills.

KEYWORDS: Mobile Phone, PowerPoint, Enhancing Writing Skills, Lecturers' Reflections

INTRODUCTION

English is the most widely spread as well as spoken language of the globe (Kitao, 1996) helping individuals and nations to attain their personal and national goals (Schramma & Srinivasan, 2015). However, in this digital or googling age (Lahlafi and Rushton, 2016) when mobile phones can help learn "almost anything" (Prensky, 2005), pedagogues in the public sector colleges in Pakistan are employing the age old conventional methods to impart language skills especially the writing skills. Besides, according to Keller (2016) "technology infusions into learning environments have grown exponentially during the past two decades", therefore, now it is the need of the hour that the pedagogues must use mobile phones to help learning writing skills so that Pakistani students can also have their due share in the global development.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Though out of the four language skills, writing is indispensable in learning and teaching process yet it is the most difficult (Dixon & Nessel, 1983) and ignored skills too, especially in Pakistan where a large number of students fail in intermediate exams only due to their poor writing skills as they do not know how to write correct English (Sultana & Zaki, 2015). Addressing the writing skills, the researchers (Shahzadie, Mushtaq & Khan, 2014; Haider, 2014a; Gulzar, Jilani & Javid, 2013; Warsi (2004) in Pakistani context blame conventional pedagogical methods to be the sole reason for the poor performance of students in writing skills. Therefore, there is "pressing need" to employ new pedagogical tools (Sultana and Zaki (2015) to address this important issue. Moreover, the following research (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2016; Shaista & Ahmad, 2015; Hayati, Jalilifar & Mashhadi, 2013; Power & Shrestha, 2010; Taradi & Taradi, 2016) having addressed various language

learning issues with mobile phones, supports the employment of mobile phone for the instruction of writing skills.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to investigate the opinions of the two lecturers (who taught both experimental as well as control) about the use of mobile phone and PowerPoint in the instruction of descriptive essay writing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The study was guided by the following research question:

What are the opinions of the lecturers regarding the employment of mobile phone as well as PowerPoint in the instruction of descriptive essay writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile technologies are sophisticated, small sized, flexible, low cost, fast and above all easy to handle having multifarious functions to hold the attention of pedagogues for language teaching purposes (Huang, Huang, Huang & Lin, 2012). And according to Pachler, Bachmair and Cook, (2010) mobile phones, in addition to changing the cultural norms, have potential to create new settings for learning. However, the pedagogues are busy wallowing in the past and “still doing a great many things the old way” (Prensky, 2005) whereas technology prevails all around. Besides, mobile technology has the potential to engage and motivate the students (Lahlafi and Rushton (2016). According to Sung, Chang and Liu (2016) mobile phones not only promote innovation in education but they also help conventional lecture style teaching by gathering and sharing information. In addition, Bogdanov (2014) claims that digital tools can engage students and to Taradi and Taradi (2016) mobile phones promote active learning. Above all to Lee (2015) mobile phones raise students’ level of academic motivation and engagement in tasks.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the total 8 weeks’ experiment which was conducted at M.A.O. College, Lahore, Pakistan. The researcher used homogeneous sampling to frame experimental as well as control groups. Both groups (45 students in each group) were taught six essay topics continuously with the help of mobile phones as well as PowerPoint. The researcher employed pre-test and post-test by asking students to write a descriptive essay on a given topic to determine their overall mean score as well as the mean score in the eight sub-skills related to the descriptive essay writing skills. The qualitative data of the study was collected through semi-structured interviews of the two lecturers (experimental and control group) which was transcribed, analyzed as well as interpreted on emerging themes foundation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings are based upon certain themes which emerged in the analysis. Under the “fun element” theme, according to the experimental group lecturer teaching with mobile phone was a “great fun” whereas teaching with PowerPoint “does not create fun” as per the opinion of lecturer control group. Therefore, the fun element was in line with Attewell and Savil-Smith (2005). With regard to the theme improvement of students’ writing, the lecturer experimental group stated that students “improved a lot” whereas according to lecturer control group her students “*learnt to a very limited level*”. Under the next theme effectiveness of pedagogical tool, according to the lecturer experimental group, not only he rather his students were more “motivated” due to mobile phones. However, the lecturer control group was “not motivated” nor were her students. The next

theme was related to the engagement of students. To lecturer experimental group all students were “well focused, engaged” while writing their essays with the help of mobile phones. However, according to the lecturer control group students were engaged but to a “limited extent”. Hence the current finding is in line with Bogdanov, 2014; Sung, Chang & Liu, 2016) who claimed that digital tools have potential to engage students. The next theme is related to students’ autonomy in the classroom. As per the views of the lecturer experimental group, students were having “complete autonomy” to share and discuss their ideas in the classroom with their peers. However, the lecturer control group stated that her student wrote their essay “without sharing” them to their peers when they were taught with PowerPoint.

The next theme was related to the confidence of the students. In this connection, the lecturer experimental group said that the students “were much confident” whereas according to the lecturer of control group her students were “not confident”. The current finding corroborates with Ali, Hodson-Carlton and Ryan (2004) who also believe that mobile phones make students confident as well as autonomous in learning. The next theme was students’ active participation. As per the views of the lecturer experimental group, students showed “active” as well as “marvelous participation” whereas the control group lecturer stated that her students “were not” active at all. Therefore, the findings are in line with Taradi and Taradi (2016) who posit that mobile phones promote active teaching and learning. Besides, with regard to the benefits of both mobile phone and PowerPoint, students of control group, according to their lecturer were not “motivated” whereas according to lecturer experimental group, students were “*extremely motivated*”. This is direct in line with (Lahlafi & Rushton, 2016; Lee, 2015) who believed mobile phones raise level of academic motivation.

CONCLUSION

The study is significant for teaching and learning writing skills. The findings indicated that the mobile phones are very effective and innovative pedagogical tools for teaching writing skills as it not only motivates students rather it makes them confident, engaged, active participants to enhance their writing skills. Besides, mobile phones have fun element for students. Hence the findings can help Pakistani lecturers to incorporate mobile phones for the instruction of writing skills. However, researchers can explore potentiality of mobile phones to be employed to teach other language skills also. The current qualitative study had only 90 male students from a public sector college with 8 weeks instruction, therefore, further research (quantitative) can be conducted with samples from private sector female students to examine the effects of mobile phones on students’ writing skills.

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